


The Three Most Critical Moments That Can Make or Break a Project


by Donna Gregorio

Abstract: A recent Forbes study revealed that four out of ten tech leaders are failing—largely due to the industry’s lack of investment in leadership development. Many technical project managers are thrust into leadership roles without the skills or tools needed to navigate key decision points, leaving them vulnerable to scope creep, misalignment, and project failure. Driven by a desire to change that, I began teaching graduate-level project management courses. I quickly discovered that my students were most engaged when I shared real-world stories—especially those where a single moment either saved or derailed a project. In this session, you’ll learn how to identify and manage **three critical turning points** in a project’s lifecycle. Through vivid examples and actionable insights, you'll walk away with practical tools to better manage change, lead with clarity, and drive project success from initiation to close.




USERS

Scope Creep: Adding features and functions without addressing the effects on time, cost, and resources. Different concerns among various team members.



DEVELOPERS



STAKEHOLDERS

Critical Tool #1 - Journey Map -> Users

Payroll Administrator: As-Is Journey Map

	Daily Duties	Other Requests	Running payroll
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Run audit reportsEnter new hire payroll formsComplete termination forms	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Resolve invalid codesPull data from HR awardsField employee questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Resolve timecard issuesUpdate absence code balancesPrepare day-after bank documents
Interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Employees to submit tax forms	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Send files to insurance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Employees to resolve timecard errorsSend payroll file to bank
Dependencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Add tax change when working outside of home state	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Simplify absence codesEnhance self-service	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Prevent employees from entering invalid project codes

For more information on Journey Maps, go to <https://itk.mitre.org>

Critical Tool #2 - Work Breakdown Structure -> Developers

Organizational Issues	Automated Staffing	Know What We Know
Catalogs	Architecture Portal	Data Catalog
Technology Enhancements	Virtual Integrations	Data Integrations

Critical Tool #3 - Status Reporting -> Stakeholders

Project Status Report (October)

25 Task Progress			
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Accomplishments: User stories, test planCurrent activities: Testing starts this weekUpcoming: Training plans			
Issues, Risks, and Change Requests			
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Current Issues: Finalizing test subjects			
Milestones & Deliverables			
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Completed integrations (9/15)Testing (10/1-15), Training kick off 11/1			
Budget Status			
Actual YTD	Plan YTD	Var \$	Var %
\$ 372,500	\$350,000	+\$22,500	+6%

Regular status reports should be succinct, easy to generate, straightforward